



National Transportation Safety Board

The Chairman's Corner

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Friday, June 13, 2008

NTSB Meets to Discuss Aviation Safety and Highway Safety Items



The National Transportation Safety Board met in a public Sunshine meeting on June 10, to discuss two transportation accidents and a safety recommendation letter.

First on the agenda was the April 12, 2007 accident in which a Bombardier/Canadair Regional Jet (CRJ) CL600-2B19, operated as Pinnacle Airline 4712, ran off the departure end of runway 28 after landing at Cherry Capital Airport, (TVC) Traverse City, Michigan. There were no injuries among the 49 passengers and 3 crewmembers and the aircraft was substantially damaged. The weather at the time of the accident was reported as snowing. Instrument meteorological conditions prevailed at the time of the accident, which was operated on an instrument flight rules flight plan.

The probable cause cites the pilots' decision to land without performing a landing distance assessment, which was required by company policy because of runway contamination initially reported by TVC ground operations personnel and continuing reports of deteriorating weather and runway conditions throughout the approach. This poor decision-making likely reflected the effects of fatigue produced by a long, demanding duty day, and, for the captain, the duties associated with check airman functions.

Also contributing to the accident were the Federal Aviation Administration pilot flight and duty time regulations that permitted the pilots' long, demanding duty day; and the TVC operations supervisor's use of ambiguous and unspecific radio phraseology in providing runway braking information.

Following discussion of this item, the Board made two recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to address human fatigue within airline operations. The NTSB recommended that the FAA develop guidance, based on empirical and scientific evidence, for operators to establish fatigue management systems, including information about the content and implementation of these systems.

The Safety Board also made a recommendation to develop and use methodology that will continually assess the effectiveness of fatigue management systems implemented by operators, including their ability to improve sleep and alertness, mitigate performance errors, and prevent incidents and accidents.

In the final item of the agenda, it was determined that the probable cause of an accident that occurred at a highway-railroad grade crossing in Elmwood Park, Illinois was a combination of factors including the intersection angle, the heavy holiday traffic and the complex street and rail pattern and related signal interactions at the intersection.

On November 23, 2005, the day before Thanksgiving, at 4:41 p.m., in Elmwood Park, Illinois, a traffic queue formed within the 366-foot-wide signaled Northeast Illinois Regional Commuter Railroad (METRA) highway-railroad grade crossing on eastbound West Grand Avenue. At the same time, METRA train 107 was approaching the crossing on the westbound tracks at a speed of 70 mph, as indicated by event data recorder information. The crossing lights were activated and the crossing gates lowered 54 seconds before the train arrived. The traffic queue trapped some stopped vehicles within the grade crossing.

As METRA train 107 approached the crossing, the engineer recognized the hazard and put the train into emergency braking. The train was unable to stop before colliding with approximately 6 of the stopped vehicles, pushing them into secondary impacts with 12 other vehicles. Seven automobile occupants received minor-to-serious injuries, and 3 of the approximately 400 train passengers reported minor injuries. The impact destroyed 6 vehicles, and 12 vehicles had minor-to-extensive damage. The locomotive incurred minor damage and did not derail.

The report adopted by the Board on Tuesday states that this grade crossing is the widest in the State of Illinois and has been the location of 45 accidents between 1956 and November 2005, resulting in a total of 7 fatalities and 27 injuries.



Chairman Rosenker Addresses Motorcoach Safety

Chairman Mark Rosenker urged New Jersey-based motorcoach executives to take action when accidents occur and make safety improvements that will bring the industry closer to an accident-free environment.

He addressed the 2008 annual membership meeting of the Greater New Jersey Motorcoach Association (GNJMA) in Atlantic City, New Jersey on June 4. Chairman Rosenker focused on some of the most notable highway accidents in recent years and the safety recommendations that have resulted from the NTSB investigations.

Rosenker pointed out that tragedies like the collapse of the Boston "Big Dig" tunnel ceiling panel and the Minneapolis bridge not only attract huge amounts of media attention, but also shake Americans' confidence in their nation's roadways. "[O]ur job [at the NTSB] is to restore the confidence of the traveling public after a major transportation disaster by conducting an unbiased, independent investigation to determine the cause of the accident and find solutions to prevent it from happening again."

In his closing remarks, Rosenker called on the New Jersey motorcoach industry executives to "find a maintenance improvement, implement a new operational policy, provide better training, embrace a new technology, but take action and do something different." Rosenker concluded by saying, "Therefore, my charge to you is, when accidents occur, which they inevitably will, take action, and do something to make your company a safer place for your passengers, your employees, your families, and your community."

Vice Chairman Sumwalt Addresses Aviation Safety and Leadership



On May 28, Vice Chairman Robert Sumwalt gave the keynote address at the FAA's Shared Vision of Aviation Safety Conference in San Diego, CA.

The Vice Chairman addressed the importance of aviation safety programs within FAA and emphasized the Board's strong support for safety management systems (SMS) in aviation industry, "When you have SMS ...the company systematically attends to those things it believes are important."

The FAA-sponsored conference focused on voluntary aviation safety programs and was attended by numerous global aviation professionals involved with safety, human factors, maintenance, management, operations, and aviation-related labor associations.

The prior week, Vice Chairman Sumwalt addressed attendees of the Regional Air Cargo Carriers Association 2008 Spring Conference held at the Westfields Marriott located in Chantilly, Virginia. During the event, the Vice Chairman spoke about the most critical component of safety culture - leadership.

"Leadership is about influence. Your job as aviation leaders is to use your influence to help ensure that bad things don't happen to your good company."

His discussion not only covered the importance of effective leadership, but also addressed three vital practices for all aviation leaders; practicing servant leadership, maintaining integrity, and establishing, communicating and achieving a worthwhile vision. Reflecting on his own experiences, Vice Chairman Sumwalt expressed how these three skills strongly influenced his own leadership abilities and the impact they can have on the safety culture of the regional carrier industry.

Member Higgins Meets with General Aviation Companies

On May 21st, 2008, Member Higgins met with the FAA's Small Airplane Directorate in Kansas City, Missouri. Ms. Kim Smith, the Directorate Manager, and her team briefed Member Higgins on the responsibility of the Directorate and the aircraft certification process. Accompanying Member Higgins was Nathaniel Hoyt, Aviation Safety Recommendation Specialist, Office of Safety Recommendations, and Ms. He Ning, Member Higgins' Confidential Assistant.

After the meeting, Member Higgins continued her trip to Wichita, Kansas to visit three member companies of the General Aviation Manufacturers Association. Member Higgins met with senior executives and safety officials of the Cessna Aircraft Company, Bombardier Learjet and Hawker Beechcraft.

In addition to meeting with the senior management and the safety staff, the one-day visit on May 22 included a tour of the facilities. The briefing at Cessna was focused on its new product development process; Bombardier Learjet emphasized its international certification activities; and Hawker Beechcraft presented its latest company-wide Safety Management System. Member Higgins also dined with the safety staff of the three companies and listened to their concerns about certification and accident investigation issues.



From left to right: He Ning, Confidential Assistant to Member Higgins; Mr. Jens Hennig, Vice President GAMA; Member Higgins; Mr. Ken Gromala, Director, Engineering Sustaining Program; and Mr. Gary Carson, Corrective Action Coordinator, Bombardier Learjet.

NTSB Visits United States Merchant Marine Academy



On May 14, Vice Chairman Robert Sumwalt, with Rob Jones and Barry Strauch of the Office of Marine Safety, participated in a day-long seminar at the United States Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York. The seminar, organized by the Nautical Institute, focused on behavioral issues in marine safety, especially on use and training for new bridge technology. During the keynote address, the Vice Chairman, shared lessons learned from implementation of advanced automation in aircraft and offered that some of those lessons learned could be applied to the maritime business. Rob Jones later spoke about bridge resource management and Barry Strauch addressed the impact of automation on mariner selection and training. About 75 members of the Nautical Institute, and USMMA students and faculty, attended the seminar.

From Left to Right: Barry Strauch (MS-20); Captain George Sandberg, USMMA; Vice Chairman Sumwalt; and Rob Jones (MS-10)

Member Hersman Addresses Graduate Students

Member Debbie Hersman addressed students at the 16th Annual Eno Leadership Development Conference held in Washington, DC on May 21st. The conference is held annually bringing some of the best and brightest graduate students in transportation to the nation's capital to gain a better understanding of how U.S. transportation policy is determined. Member Hersman provided an overview of the Board's mission, and her presentation included animations depicting aviation, rail, and highway accidents the Board has recently investigated.

Member Higgins Speaks to FAA Gathering on Unmanned Aircraft Systems

In an address to the FAA Unmanned Aircraft Systems Semi-Annual Conference on June 2nd in Washington, D.C., Member Kitty Higgins shared what she and other Safety Board Members and staff learned from the two-day UAS safety forum held in the Board Room and Conference Center on April 29-30, 2008.

Member Higgins told the group of more than 100 in attendance, that the forum was very helpful in providing the Board with a broad range of information on the safety, utility and potential future UAS applications in this rapidly growing aviation sector. The forum was particularly useful in broadening the understanding within the UAS community about issues related to the processes by which UAS certificates of authorization (COAs) are issued, integration of UAS into the national airspace system, the new human factors issues that must be considered, and the challenges of a developing an effective sense, detect and avoid system for unmanned aircraft.

After touching on the tension between the interests of safe operations of UAS and the desire by potential operators for quick approval for unrestricted access to the NAS, Member Higgins emphasized that there was still much to learn: "The aviation community's knowledge about UAS operations and applications is not mature – and further education and dialogue would be important to advance integration of unmanned aircraft into the national airspace system."

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